

S.N. 10/600,204
Amendment
Page 3 of 11

Please amend the claims to the following:

1-5 (canceled)

6.(currently amended) A method for welding together two layers of thermoplastic material, comprising the steps of:

providing first and second opposed dies, each of said dies having a flat portion and defining a recess adjacent to said flat portion;

placing at least two substantially flat layers of thermoplastic material between said first and second opposed dies, with the flat portions of the dies opposite each other and the recessed portions of the dies opposite each other;

applying energy to said dies to melt the thermoplastic material between said dies;
and

pressing said dies together to compress and reduce the thickness of the material between the flat portions of the dies at least 70%, thereby extruding some of the thermoplastic material into the recesses of said dies; and

producing a weld that is at least 50% as strong as one of the layers of the thermoplastic material.

7.(original) A method for welding together two layers of thermoplastic material as recited in claim 6, wherein said heating is achieved by applying radio frequency electrical energy to the dies, and wherein the opposed recesses in the first and second opposed dies are mirror images of each other.

S.N. 10/600,204
Amendment
Page 4 of 11

8.(currently amended) A method for welding together two layers of thermoplastic material as recited in claim 6 7, and further comprising the step of causing the layers on the recessed side of the dies to be held apart from each other throughout during the extruding process.

9.(original) A method for welding together two layers of thermoplastic material as recited in claim 8, wherein said flat surfaces and said recesses define the perimeter of an inflatable welded item; and
wherein the layers are held apart by inflating the item.

10.(currently amended) A method for welding together two layers of thermoplastic material as recited in claim 6 7, wherein there is a projection from one of the dies that lies adjacent to the flat surface of its respective die and projects toward the other of the dies beyond a plane formed by the flat surface of its respective die and further damming the side of said flat portions opposite said recesses by using said projection in order to direct extruded material toward said recesses.

11.(original) A method for welding together two layers of thermoplastic material as recited in claim 9, and further damming the side of said flat portions opposite said recesses in order to direct extruded material toward said recesses.

S.N. 10/600,204
Amendment
Page 5 of 11

12.(currently amended) A method for welding together layers of thermoplastic material of uniform thickness to form an airtight, inflatable product, comprising the steps of:

providing first and second opposed dies including opposed flat surfaces and opposed recesses adjacent to said opposed flat surfaces, so as to define the perimeter of the inflatable product;

placing the substantially flat layers of thermoplastic material between said opposed dies;

applying energy to melt the thermoplastic material between the opposed flat surfaces;

injecting gas between said layers in order to hold the layers apart from each other within said perimeter; and

pressing said dies together to reduce the thickness of the thermoplastic material between the flat surfaces at least until the gap between said opposed flat surfaces is less than 60% of said uniform thickness in order to extrude some of the melted material into the recesses.

13.(original) A method as recited in claim 12, wherein there is a valve extending through one of said layers, and the step of injecting gas includes injecting gas through said valve.

14-29 (canceled)

S.N. 10/600,204
Amendment
Page 6 of 11

30.(new) A method as recited in claim 12, wherein said step of injecting gas occurs before the step of applying energy to melt the thermoplastic material, and wherein said gas pushes said extruded melted material against the recesses.

31.(new) A method as recited in claim 9, wherein each of said dies also has a steeply tapered wall adjacent its respective recess, and including the step of pressing said layers against their respective steeply tapered walls while the energy is being applied.